"Who Built The Forts?"

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"WHO BUILT THE FORTS?"

An Interesting Paper Read Before The Anna Warner Bailey Chapter, of Groton and Stonington, D. A. R.---Written by Miss Mary E. Benjamin.

In the following most interesting paper by Miss Mary E. Benjamin, of New London, a question of the builders of Forts Griswold and Trumbull finds an unquestionable solution. The paper is most timely and is not alone printed because of its interest but at the request of the members of the Anna Warner Bailey chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, before whom it was read, Thursday, April 14th, 1898:

Suns rise and set, days, months and years roll on. The present, to-day, is the past, to-morrow, and history is constantly being evolved.

Our minds do not grasp, cannot all, that history implies. The earth has been peopled with a seething, surging humanity, where has been the struggle of ages for supremacy. The enormous expenditure of money, the rivers of blood through which contending nations have passed, never can be told. Research of the history of past nations, of battlefields immortalized by struggle and death, will never exhaust itself. But the patriotic societies of today deal with "home and country." We are to become better informed regarding the deeds of those who fought for our individual happiness and freedom.

We have a country (a glorious one) and when we consider that your ancestors and mine, made it what it is, why not 23,000 strong, rise to do them honor?

The women of today may never experience the hardships, privations and death-loss of husband, son or father, and it seems more than impossible for us to conceive how noble they were. When we look over our own fair town, most "beautiful for situation," how can we realize the bombarding fleets, the burning, pillaged, deserted town. I have endervored to picture to myself the "patriotic Jonathan Brooks," who with "the singed cat," were for a time, the only occupants of the same. Preparations had been made, both sides of the river to repel the invaders. Fort Griswold, then in its birth struggle, was to become a strong contending foe to the on-coming enemy. *Who of us know its history? Whose conception it was or who carried the plans into execution?* Here it stands today, with its green ramparts, quiet, calm, serene, little evidence to be seen of the horrors of that dreadful massacre. Who then planned the infant fort, who carried into execution those plans, I repeat? The immortal Ledyard came of good stock; those of that day were "faithful sons of noble sires," for historical records tell us "*Mr. Ebenezer Ledyard and Parke Avery built the fort.*"

Who built the fort? *Thrice I repeat it, Ebenezer Ledyard* and *Parke Avery*, and it received its baptism with life-blood of friend and brother. Ebenezer Ledyard gave himself on parol for his neighbor and friend, and Parke Avery (of the illustrious family of whom NINE laid down their sword in mortal combat) gave brain and brawn to the service.

In colonial records of Connecticut, volume xv, page 452, we read "An account of Ebenezer Ledyard, Esq, and Mr. Parke Avery (a committee who built the fort at Groton) laid in, examined, adjusted and allowed thereon, the sum of £265.7.9 in discharge thereof, and voted that an order be drawn for that sum." "An order is drawn and delivered Mr. Ledyard, July 3, 1776."

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"On the 25th of July, 1775, three British ships of war came athwart New London harbor and anchored. These were the Rose, commanded by Captain Wallace, the Swan and the Kingfisher. This was a virtual blockade and created much alarm. The town had no defense, but *the spirit of her inhabitants.* The sole strength

of the fort was its garrison, which consisted chiefly of captains and mates of vessels that lay unemployed at its wharves.

No other commander on this coast acquired a renown so odious as Captain Wallace of the Rose. He was the terror of the small forts and small vessels, capturing and plundering without discrimination, and threatening various points with attack. On the 30th of August he verified his threats by a cannonade of the thriving village of Stonington, Long Point. On this exposed peninsula about half a mile in length (formerly a moiety of the Cheeseborough farm) a hardy company of mariners and artisans had clustered together and acquired a creditable share of the trade of the Sound.

The tender of the Rose, whose business it was to destroy everything in the shape of keel, or sail, that came in its way, pursued one of its victims to the wharf of the village. Captain Benjamin Pendleton and other brave and true men were there, and the tender was soon driven from its prey. But the Rose came up and, without summons or communication of any kind, opened her broadside upon the village. She continued firing at intervals for hours, until the pursued vessel was cut out and conveyed away. Only sound shots were used and therefore no houses took fire, though several were shattered by the balls. Only one man was wounded, but none killed.

Hinman, page 162, says: "At the October session of the legislature, 1775, the sum of £12.4.4 was allowed Jonathan Weaver, Jr., (a music man) in the company of Captain Oliver Smith, who was dangerously wounded at Stonington, Long Point."

And when Stonington was again cannonaded by the British, August 9, 1814, *one man only* was severely wounded, no one was killed. On the 5th and 6th of August, 1775, a fleet of nine ships and several smaller vessels gathered around New London harbor and appeared as if about to enter. Expresses were sent forth to alarm the country, but it was soon ascertained that the object of the fleet was to secure the stock that was owned upon the fertile islands of the sound. From Fishers Island alone was taken 1,100 sheep, beside cattle and other provisions, for which they made a reasonable compensation to Mr. Brown, the lessee of the Island; but from

Gardiners and Plum Islands they took what they wanted without payment. This incident, probably, operated as a spur upon the higher powers of the colony in regard to a subject much discussed in their councils, viz: *The fortifications of New London.*

Among the heads of inquiry proposed by his "Majesty's Secretary of State," to the Colony of Connecticut in 1773 was this: "*What forts and places of defense are there within your government and in what condition?*" To which Governor Trumbull replied, October, 1774, "*A small battery at New London, consisting of nine guns, built and supported at the colony's expense.*" This, then, was the *only fortification in Connecticut* when the war was commenced. But the defense of the coast was a subject to which the attention of the legislature was soon called. April, 1775, a committee was appointed to examine the points of defense and report on the best means of securing the country from invasion. Of this committee Messrs. G. Saltonstall, D. Deshon and T. Mumford reported in regard to New London. "*That the battery was in a ruinous condition and that the only effective cannon in the place consisted of six new pieces* (*four eighteens and two twelves.*) *They proposed that three positions, viz: Mamacock, Winthrop's Neck and Groton Height, should be fortified and that fourteen new cannon* (*twenty-fours*), *should be purchased*'

This judicious advice was not adopted, probably on account of a void in the treasury. All that was obtained at this time, was an order to repair and complete the old fort. This was done during the summer under the direction of Colonel Saltonstall, who in effect rebuilt the works, and mounted upon them all the cannons in the town. This fortification stood near the water's edge, where is now the ferry landing to Groton. Here was the battlement, the platform, the cannon and the flag-staff; the magazines stood a little to the west. The garrison consisted of from twelve to twenty men, Nathaniel Saltonstall, captain; Stephen Hempstead, lieutenant.

On the Groton side of the river, *with a spirit of enthusiasm that did not wait for legislative aid the inhabitants voluntarily threw up intrenchments, excavated ditches and erected breastworks at sundry exposed places which, though they had no ordnance except a few*

pieces at the principal battery on the heights, obtained from the supply brought in by Commodore Hopkins, they resolved to defend to the last extremity. On the river below Norwich (at Waterman's Point), a battery was erected under the superintendence of Benjamin Huntington and Ephraim Bill and furnished with four six-pounders. *Such were the preparations made to receive the enemy in 1775.*

The governor and council of safety, acceding to the oft repeated request of the inhabitants that something further might be done for them in the way of fortification, sent Colonel Jedediah Elderkin to New London in 1775 to view the premises, and report what fortifications were necessary. After a general survey and consultation with the principal men both sides of the river, he confirmed the judgment heretofore given by the committee and recommended the immediate fortification of the three points designated by them. The neck of land bounding New London harbor on the south, now called Fort Neck, but then known by its Indian name (Mamacock) was then a broad irregular platform of rocks, rising twenty feet above the water, and connected with the main land by meadows and marshes.

Here Colonel Elderkin proposed the erection of a rampart fronting east eighty feet, south eighty feet, north eighty feet, but not at right angles, with five embrasures in each bank to be defended by five cannon, eighteen or twenty pounders.

The point selected on the Groton side was nearly opposite the center of the harbor. The ascent within fifty rods of the water's edge was 120 feet. The summit was tolerably level. Here it was supposed that a breastwork of turf and gravel, with some ten pieces of cannon, would be all that was necessary. It was also recommended that a breastwork should be raised on Winthrop's Neck and planted with ten cannon.

This report of Colonel Elderkin was made to the governor and council, November 15th. In Elderkin's report the land at Mamacock was purchased of Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., and an acre and a quarter for the works at Groton of Jonathan Chester and Elisha Prior. *Groton fort was commenced December 5th, 1775*, and on the 22d orders were issued for the works to be commenced under the

direction of a committee of six persons: Colonel Saltonstall, Ebenezer Ledyard, John Deshon, Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., Peter Avery and Josiah Watrous (Waters). In December, 1775, the two principal works were honored with the names of the governor, and deputy governor, Trumbull and Griswold, they were imperfect and unfinished. This is not surprising when we note the difficulties which in those revolutionary times stood in the way of public works. The labor was performed by relays of fresh recruits, changed every few weeks, under the direction of the civil authority and field officers. These labors were performed in part by mere boys or in part by aged persons, who had perhaps the judgment, but not physical energy. In the case of these small fortifications, the legislature must first discuss the matter and pass the resolves; the governor and council of safety must take it up; Colonel Saltonstall must be consulted; Mr. Shaw must be summoned to Hartford to give advice; Colonel Mott must be sent to New London to survey; Colonel Dyer and Mr. Wales must examine and report. The works begin, stop, go on. The governor and council direct just the number of sledges, hammers, shovels, spades, crowbars, pickaxes, chains, etc., are to be provided for the work. Timber, tools, teams and other necessary materials, are to be procured by Colonel Saltonstall for Winthrop's Neck; by Ebenezer Ledyard, for Groton, and Nathaniel Shaw, for Mamacock. The timber was in the forests, and must be selected while growing.

The assembly must now apply to Congress for cannon to furnish their works, asking for some of the brass pieces taken at St. Johns. They must apply to Admiral Hopkins for some of the New Providence ordnance. They cannot obtain the necessary complement, and it is decided that the heavy cannon must be cast in Smith's furnaces at Salisbury, Ct. In order to accomplish this the furnace must be enlarged, new workmen obtained, higher wages given, woodland must be bought to obtain fuel for the furnace, and all these details must be performed by the executive officers of the state; Colonel Elderkin and others must make journeys to and forth from Salisbury to Hartford, to manage the business. In the summer of 1777 the works were regarded as finished.

The engineer of Fort Trumbull was Colonel Josiah Waters; of Fort Griswold, Colonel Samuel Mott. Two artillery companies, one for each fortress, were raised, and of these Nathaniel Saltonstall and William Ledyard were the first captains and must be regarded as the first actual commanders of Forts Trumbull and Griswold. They were appointed July 3, 1776.—(*Miss Calkin's Hist. of New London.*)

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Our effort has been made to prove who built the forts: the dreadful massacre, and all that pertains to New London and Groton in the siege of 1781, probably even most of the Children of the American Revolution know, but who built the defences that to-day they ramble over—how many can tell?

In March, 1778, Captain William Ledyard was appointed to the command of the posts of New London, Groton and Stonington, with the rank and pay of major. Under his direction the works were repaired and strengthened and additional batteries erected. William Latham was captain of artillery at Groton and Adam Shapley at New London.

In Connecticut Colonial Records, volume xv., we read: "Voted, That Ebenezer Ledyard, Esq., apply to Mr. Jonathan Chester, of Groton, for liberty for the engineers at Groton to convey as much of said Chester's land as shall be wanted for the use of the fort there, and agree with said Chester upon some good men to apprize such land on oath to be purchased by the colony and make a report thereof to the general assembly in May next."

Colonial Records of Connecticut, volume xv., page 205, April 16, 1777: "Major Nathan Gallup is appointed, instead of Luke Perkins, deceased, to assist in apprizing damages due to Mr. Jonathan Chester, of Groton, by building the forts at Groton; by building said forts on his land, and if any objection arises against Major Gallup then the committee is to agree with Captain Chester or one in his room."

"Voted, To draw an order on the pay-table in favor of Captain Jonathan Chester for £15 in part for his land taken for the forts at Groton. Order delivered to Mr. Thomas Chester inclosed in a letter."

Connecticut Colonial Records, volume xv, page 392: "At a meeting of the Governor and Council of Safety, September 5, 1777, Voted and resolved, To draw on the pay-table for ninety-nine pounds in favor of Captain Jonathan Chester, of Groton, in full satisfaction (with fifteen pounds already paid him) for the land taken from him for the use of the forts at Groton, for which he has given a *deed* to the governor and company of this state. Order delivered to Major Hillhouse September 5, 1777."

The original deed was as follows:

To all people to Whom these presents shall come, Greeting: Know ye, that I, Jonathan Chester of Groton, in the County of New London, for the consideration of £114.0.0, Lawful Money Received to my full satisfaction of the Governor and Company of the State of Connecticut, Do hereby Give, Grant, Bargain, sell and Confirm, unto the said Governor and Company of the State of Connecticut, A Certain Tract or Parcel of Land, Lying and being in Groton, aforesaid, Bounded as follows, (viz): Beginning at the Southwest Corner of the West Battery, thence East 25 Degrees, South 7 Rods and 3 Links; thence East 8 Degrees, South 31 Rods to a mear stone, thence North 24 Degrees, East 8 Rods and four Links to a heap of Stones, thence West 12 Degrees, North 40 Rods and 20 Links to the Edge of the Rock, thence South 24 Degrees, West 9 Rods to the first Bound, containing 2 Acres, 1 Quarter and 3 Rods. To have and to Hold the said Granted and Bargained Premises, with the appurtenances thereof unto the said Governor and Company forever to his and their Own proper use, and I Do hereby, for myself, my hiers, executors and Administrators, Covenant to and with the said Governor and Company that at and until the Ensealing of these Presents I am well seized of the Premises as a Good, Indefeasible Estate in fee simple, and that I have Good Right to Bargain and Sell the Same in manner and form above Written and that the same is free and clear of all Incumbrances Whatsoever, and furthermore I Do hereby for myself, my hiers, executors and Administrators covenant and promise to the Said Governor and Company to Warrant and Defend the said Granted premises to him and them Against all Claims and Demands Whatsoever. In Witness Whereof I have

hereunto set my hand and Seal this 7th Day of October Anno Domini 1777.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in presence of

WILLIAM SALTONSTALL,
MARVIN WAIT.

JONATHAN CHESTER.
[Seal.]

New London, County of New London, 7th October, 1777.

Personally appeared Jonathan Chester, Grantee, and acknowledged the foregoing to be his free Act and Deed, Before me.

WILLIAM SALTONSTALL,
Justice Peace.

ELISHA PRIOR'S DEED.

To all people, to whom these presents Shall come, Greeting; Know ye, that I, Elisha Prior, of Groton, in the County of New London, for the Consideration of fifty-six Pounds Lawful Money, received to my full Satisfaction of the Governor and Company of the State of Connecticut, Do Give, Grant, Bargain, Sell and Convey unto the said Governor and Company, A Certain Tract, or parcel of Land Lying, and being in Groton Aforesaid. Bounded as followeth, (viz): Beginning at a heap of Stones by the Stone wall of Capt. Chester's Land, that he Sold Said Prior, a little Easterly, of the upper Fort, thence W. 12 degrees, N. in the line said Prior bought of Capt. Chester 42 Rods and 20 Links; to the west Edge, of the Rocks, and battery, thence, Southerly, to a bound Sold by Capt. Chester, to the Governor and Company 5 Rods, thence Easterly, in Chester's line, about 40 Rods, to another bound of Chester's, a heap of stones—thence Northerly 5 Rods to the first mentioned bound, Containing one Acre, and One Quarter. To have, and to hold, the said Granted, and bargained premises, with the Appurtenances, thereof unto the Said Govr. and Comp:y forever to their Own proper use, and I do hereby, for myself, my hiers, Executors, and Administrators, Covenant, to, and with the said Govr. and

Comp:y that at, and until the Ensealing of these presents, I am well seized of the premises, as a Good Indefeasible Estate in Fee Simple, and that I have good right, to bargain, and sell the Same, in manner and form as above Written, and that the same, is free and clear, of all incumbrances Whatsoever, and furthermore I Do hereby for myself, my hiers, and Executors Covenant, and promise to the Said Govr. and Comp:y, to Warrant and Defend. the said bargained premises, against all Claims, and Demands Whatsoever.

In witness—Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and Seal this 16th Day of September A. D. 1777

Signed, Sealed & De:d
In presence of
EDWARD JEFFERY
YOUNGS LEDYARD.

ELISHA PRIOR.

[Seal]

New London, Sep:m. 16th 1777.

Elisha Prior, of Groton, in New London County, the Signer and Sealer, of the foregoing Instrument,

Personally Appeared before Me, the Subscriber, and Acknowledged the Same, to be his free Act, and Deed.

CORAM WILLIAM NOYES,
Just:c. Peace.

Said Deeds from Groton Records, Book 9, page 31.

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Our question, Who built the Forts? has been answered by "confirmation strong (almost) as proof of Holy Writ." Let us satisfy ourselves thoroughly who was *Ebenezer* Ledyard, Esq., so prominently active in its construction.

Ebenezer Ledyard, Esq., the third son of John Ledyard and Deborah Youngs, was a shipowner and West India merchant of wealth and influence. His position was such that in the account of the times his given name is hardly known, being always called "Squire Ledyard." He was among the foremost in all actions tending to help the colonies to success. In the account given, Captain Bromfield paroled the wounded men who were left and took Ebenezer

Ledyard, Esq., as a hostage for them left on parol "to see them forthcoming if called for."

"In this he dared to brave the dangers of the British prison ship that his wounded friends and neighbors might have the care of friends in their sufferings."

Stephen Hempstead speaks of this, and also of the fact of his procuring "a sentinel to guard the wounded from molestation until the last of the enemy had embarked." His house and all other property burnable was destroyed by fire. In the fire land awards his loss was much the largest of any one in Groton. He was the father of thirteen sons."

"Ebenezer Ledyard, of Groton, one of the committee in charge of the construction of the fort in 1775, was also one of its hapless garrison. He was taken prisoner, and held to the close of the war, as an hostage for a body of wounded prisoners."—Morgan Genealogy.

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Historians tell us there remains today no more complete relic of the Revolutionary struggle than the grassy ramparts of Fort Griswold. The pickets, platforms and barracks are dust. but the ramparts are as perfect as when left by the hands of the builders.

The tourist who inspects these walls can but admire the skill and judgment of the farmer engineers who constructed them.

The hill which they crown rises steeply from the water's edge to a height of more than a hundred feet.

The central area of the fort is nearly square, being 150 feet in length by 110 in width. The walls are of stone, ten or twelve feet in height, and sodded.

On the wall was a row of pickets, projecting over twelve feet, and above these was built a parapet with embrasures for guns, and within a platform for cannon. The entrance, twelve feet wide, was in the northern wall, and protected by a gate and a triangular battery, one hundred and twenty yards distant on which was mounted a three pounder. Bastions at each corner enfiladed the walls, and a ditch thirty feet wide and seven feet deep surrounded the fort, except on the southwest where a ledge of rocks formed a natural wall.

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Half way down the hill slope, towards the river, was a small battery communicating by a covered way with the fort, but which was of no service except in case of a water attack.

The ramparts of Fort Griswold are as perfect as when left by the hands of the builders.—Magazine of American History. Vol. VI. page 163.

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While then, we give immortal honor to Colonel William Ledyard, let us not forget the unselfish and noble *Ebenezer* Ledyard who like a seer saw the impending storm and made all haste in his endeavors to construct the fort and save Groton and the surrounding country from the ruthless foe—or Youngs Ledyard, who like them exemplified by giving his life that "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." Noble trio!

"They sleep their last sleep
They have fought their last battle
No sound can awake them to glory again."

M. E. B.

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